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ABSTRACT

Education for minority group children has been completely inadequate through the failure of educators to understand sympathetically the children's linguistic and cultural backgrounds and through the erroneous emphasis upon replacing "poor speech habits" rather than adding a second dialect (standard English). To help reduce the gap between ideals proclaimed by national educational advisors and actual conditions, the USOE supplies funds for several programs: (1) the Bilingual Education Act provides for instruction in a child's first language as well as in standard English, thus assuring status for his own culture; (2) the Career Opportunities Program promotes the recruitment and training of low-income and minority group high school graduates for work with disadvantaged youth; and (3) the Triple T Program trains the trainers of teachers and other educators, and implements permanent changes in institutions which have failed to prepare educators of minority children--especially in the language arts. Those working with children whose first language is not standard English must have an understanding of the nature of language and the cultural, social, and classroom factors of second language learning. (JM)

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ON LANGUAGE ARTS AND MINORITY CHILDREN

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An impressive array of educators agree on at least two points concerning the education of children from minority groups. They state that the schools in this country have failed to educate these children, and they single out instruction in the language arts as critically important in any educational program for them. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that while there is widespread agreement concerning the importance of language arts programs for these children, present conditions in most schools preclude their effectiveness. It seeks to show that this is a major factor contributing to the failure of the schools to educate them. It suggests further that additional millions of dollars for "language arts instruction" made available directly to schools in which such conditions exist will continue to be ineffective, and concludes that although there are promising projects currently being conducted which aim at improving these conditions, stronger national leadership is necessary if significant changes are to be realized in language arts programs for minority children. Finally, some suggestions are made concerning information which should be made available to teachers and others responsible for such programs.

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* A revised version of a paper read at the convention.

Regarding the failure of the schools (and our society's failure as well), Donald Smith has recorded what is probably a typical indictment of the educational process for children from minority groups. "Teachers have failed," he feels, "because, for the most part, they don't know anything about, care little about, and have not been trained to teach their black and brown pupils."[1] The report of a national conference on the education of the disadvantaged pinpoints failure in more specific terms, noting that the schools refuse to accept the reality that thousands of American children cannot speak standard English when they are in kindergarten or first grade, that to ignore this reality is to doom these children to failure, and that "educational statistics prove this is exactly what we are doing."[2]

There also appears to be general agreement that a sound language arts program is particularly crucial to success in the education of children from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In 1966 the National Advisory Council on the Education of Disadvantaged Children stated that "the major weakness [that undermines the educational achievement of minority children] lies in the area of the language arts."[3]

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[1] Donald H. Smith, "Imperative Issues in Urban Education," in Teacher Education: Issues and Innovations (Washington, D. C.: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1968), p. 50.

[2] Report of the Proceedings of the National Conference on the Education of the Disadvantaged (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1966), p. 11.

[3] Annual Report of the National Advisory Council on the Education of Disadvantaged Children (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1966), p. 7.

A year later the section concerning education for disadvantaged youth in the Kerner Report recommended an intensive year-round program "to improve the verbal skills of people in low-income areas, with primary emphasis on language problems of minority groups."[4] The U. S. Commissioner of Education has stated that a major educational target for the 1970's will be to insure that "no one shall be leaving our schools without the skills necessary to read."[5] And the head of the bureau in the U. S. Office of Education responsible for federally supported teacher training programs has noted that education in this country needs to move from a single culture, white, western, with a primarily Protestant view of past and present, to a multi-cultural view of education, and that "this won't be done until we get administrators and teachers and support personnel in our schools who themselves have a multi-cultural point of view."[6]

Results of studies which examine both the formal preparation and the established attitudes of educators working with minority children reveal an incredible gap between the conditions

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4 Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (New York: New York Times Company, 1968), p. 449.

5 James E. Allen, Jr., "The Right to Read--Target for the 70's" paper delivered before the National Association of State Boards of Education, September 23, 1969 (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Office of Education), p. 4.

6 Statement by Don Davies, Associate Commissioner for Educational Personnel Development, U. S. Office of Education, reported in NCTE Council-Grams, XXX, 4 May, 1969, p. 5.

necessary to achieve these ideals proclaimed by the nation's top educational advisors, and actual conditions existing in the schools. They raise grave doubts concerning the effectiveness of the literally millions of dollars in federal funds being made available directly to local schools for use in "language arts for the disadvantaged."[7]

One study which raises such doubts is concerned with the preparation of teachers of English as a second language, that is, those who are entrusted with the teaching of English to Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, American Indian, and other minority group children in our nation.[8] It reveals that such teachers are almost totally unprepared for their work, indicating that of the elementary and secondary school teachers sampled:

91% had no practice teaching in ESL.
85% had no formal study in methods of teaching ESL.
80% had no formal training in English syntax.
65% had no training in general linguistics.

As part of a larger survey of speech in Detroit, Roger Shuy made a revealing study of teacher attitudes toward the language

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7 Under one federal program alone, fiscal year 1967 expenditures for language arts instruction for disadvantaged children amounted to 350 million dollars, and involved over 4.5 million pupils. From Statistical Report, Fiscal Year 1967, Title I, Year II (Washington, D.C.: Office of Education, 1968) pp. 4, 24. The Office of Education's TEMPO study concerning the effectiveness of Title I programs used reading scores as measures of achievement, and found "little, if any" improvement after the first year of such expenditures.

8 Harold B. Allen, The Survey of the Teaching of English to Non-English Speakers in the United States (Champaign, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1966), pp. 29-30.

of black students in their classes.[9] The results indicated an extraordinary lack of understanding on the part of the teachers sampled, concerning the nature of the language of their black students. They came up with such views as:

> "they have only about one hundred words in their vocabulary."
>
> "they are non-verbal, or speak in single words, not sentences."
>
> "they don't communicate with their families."

Teachers with such views concerning the linguistic characteristics of their black students are also likely to harbor misconceptions regarding their capacities and abilities in other areas. But, in spite of the information coming from carefully conducted studies of social dialects by linguists at the Center for Applied Linguistics and elsewhere, we still find large educational projects, supported by government grants and purporting to educate black children, concerned with such questionable or impossible tasks as "replacing poor speech habits" (instead of <u>adding</u> a second dialect) and "cataloguing specific speech deficiencies" (instead of specifying speech <u>differences</u>).

Another recent report which reveals more damaging inadequacies concerns the education of Mexican-American children in the San Antonio schools. Completed by the Civil Rights Commission,

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9 Roger Shuy, Walter Wolfram, and William Riley, <u>Linguistic Correlates of Social Stratification in Detroit Speech</u>, Cooperative Research Project No. 6-1347, Part IV (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University, 1967), pp. 2-5.

it indicates that inadequate understanding, on the part of many educators, of the language and culture of Mexican-American children has resulted in drastic shortcomings in their education and disruption of their lives.[10] Specifically, the report reveals among other things, that Mexican-American children are sometimes assigned to classes for the mentally retarded merely because their language happens to be different from that of the majority culture. How often this kind of atrocity is inflicted upon other minority group children in other areas of this country can only be surmised.[11]

Studies have shown that teacher attitudes toward their students have very powerful impacts upon educational achievement,[12]

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10 Staff Report, A Study of Equality of Educational Opportunity for Mexican-Americans in Nine School Districts of the San Antonio Area (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1969), pp. 34-35.

11 One indication of the extent of this practice is revealed in a report that the California State Board of Education recently had to be required by court action to begin giving intelligence tests in the language of the children being tested. Evidence cited in the action included an estimate that 22,000 Mexican-American children were in classes for the mentally retarded in California schools, evidently because educators there were making the judgement that ability to read a foreign language was somehow an accurate measure of intelligence. Reported in The New York Times, Feb. 8, 1970.

12 This has been demonstrated in "Self-Fulfilling Prophecies in the Classroom: Teacher's Expectations as Unintended Determinates of Pupils' Intellectual Competence", a paper by Robert Rosenthal and Lenor Jacobson, delivered at the American Psychological Association Meeting, Washington, D. C., September, 1967, reprinted in Scientific American, 218 , 4, April, 1968. pp. 20-25.

and the changing of teacher attitudes and expectations regarding minority children has been called "the number one imperative in urban education."[13] Yet influential educators continue to perpetuate unsubstantiated views concerning the nature of the language of minority children. Such views as the following can be expected to adversely influence the attitudes of teachers toward their students. It has been reported, for example, that the speech of deprived children "seems to consist not of distinct words, as does the speech of middle-class children of the same ages, [but rather of] phrases or sentences that function like giant words [and that such children] at four years of age hardly speak at all."[14] This continues in spite of the fact that such views have been carefully refuted by scholars studying social dialects.[15]

Research studies may also suffer when careful attention is not given to the linguistic and cultural characteristics of minority children. A recent report on minority education in New York state, for example, noted that weaknesses in intervention research derived in large measure from "incredible ignorance about the culture from which 'culturally

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13 Donald H. Smith, "Imperative Issues in Urban Education", op. cit. p. 51.

14 Carl Bereiter and Sigfried Engelmann, Teaching Disadvantaged Children in the Pre-school (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1966), pp. 31-34.

15 Most notably, William Labov in The Study of Non-Standard English (Washington, D. C.: The Center for Applied Linguistics, 1969), pp. 47-51.

deprived' children come."[16] Programs for minority children based upon such research are likely to be less than effective.

Teachers, administrators and researchers with such misconceptions about minority children cannot be expected to design and implement effective programs for them in any subject area, let alone the language arts. Yet the attitudes of educators will not change without an understanding of the backgrounds of these children, and such understanding cannot take place without study of other languages, other dialects, and other cultures.

Read together, these statements and studies constitute a convincing argument for the view that the schools have failed minority group children, that a major cause of this has been the failure of educators to understand the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of such children, and that there must be increased attention given to training educational personnel to bring about this understanding, if education of minority children is to improve. In the past, a small number of such persons have been trained for work in bilingual education projects, in English as a second language, social dialectology, reading, and other areas of the language arts. Some training has been done through institutes and fellowship programs supported by the U. S. Office of Education, but the number of participants in these programs has not been

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16 The University of the State of New York, Racial and Social Class Isolation in the Schools, (Albany, New York: The State Education Department, 1969), p. 418.

significant in relation to what is needed. During the period 1964-1968, for example, some 1650 ESL teachers were trained under the NDEA, and during 1969, the first year of the Education Professions Development Act (EPDA), some 800 are being trained, although there are over 100,000 English teachers in the schools today.

Despite these needs, and despite the rhetoric of both the Commissioner of Education ("no one shall be leaving the schools without the skills necessary to read"), and the Associate Commissioner in charge of teacher education ("we must move...to a multi-cultural view of education"), substantial resources needed to achieve these goals do not appear to be forthcoming. For example, the response of the Associate Commissioner in charge of teacher education to this (his own) challenge has been to inform colleges and universities throughout the nation that funds would no longer be available to train educational personnel in such subjects as foreign languages, English, history, and others crucial to an understanding of the language and culture of minority group children. Those colleges and universities which do have the expertise available to help train educators in these critical areas are, with few exceptions, cut off from resources to do the job.

This is particularly unfortunate since the present state of affairs in the schools can be attributed in large measure to teacher preparation institutions which lack realistic curriculums

for language arts teachers who will work with minority children, and which have failed to produce educators sensitive to the cultural and linguistic characteristics of such children. How many such institutions, for example, offer courses in linguistics, social dialects, English structure, cultural anthropology, and others--most crucial if educators are to have that multi-cultural view of education which the Associate Commissioner has called for? It is likely that a survey would reveal few, if any, teacher preparation institutions offering such courses.

The outlook is not entirely bleak of course. There are projects continuing to be funded by the U. S. Office of Education which are attempting to train educators in these areas, to bring about changes in the institutions which produce teachers, and to provide realistic language arts programs for children whose first language or dialect is other than standard English. Perhaps the most promising programs currently being conducted are those supported under the Bilingual Education Act. Providing for instruction through the child's first language as well as instruction in English as a second language, the seventy-five projects currently in operation attempt to protect the non-English speaking child from the absurdity of expecting him to learn subjects solely through English, even though he may not be able to speak or understand it. (Absurdity or not, this has been standard practice even in schools with majority concentrations of non-English speaking children). In addition to providing in-

struction through a language which the child understands, the projects are designed to furnish him (as well as participating Anglo children) with the valuable asset of fluency and literacy in two languages, and to provide status for the minority child's first language and culture.

Another promising program is designed to recruit and train more persons from low-income backgrounds for work in the schools. This is the Career Opportunities Program administered by the U. S. Office of Education under the EPDA. It has as a major goal the recruitment and training of low-income and minority group high-school graduates for work in the public schools. The promise of success in such projects lies in the prospect that well-trained members of minority groups, who themselves have a first-hand knowledge of the language and cultural backgrounds of children from their own groups, will be able to understand and work effectively with them in language arts as well as other subjects. Training Mexican-American high school graduates to teach in and administer school programs for Mexican-American children, for example, is likely to be more productive in the long run than unrealistic attempts to teach Anglos to speak enough Spanish and understand enough about Mexican-American culture in the short space of six weeks to make a significant difference in their work with such children. This is not to support a "you-have-to-be-one-to-teach-one" viewpoint, but rather to suggest that being a member of a minority group is an incalculable advantage in understanding children from the same group, and that this understanding

is likely to be translated into more effective classroom performance.

A promising program aimed at institutional change is the Triple T Program of the U. S. Office of Education which attempts to reach teacher trainers and other educators, and to assist in bringing about permanent changes in those institutions which have so clearly failed to adequately prepare educators to work with minority children. A few such projects are directly concerned with training educators in language arts, especially as they relate to disadvantaged children. The projects bring together subject-matter specialists, school administrators, teachers, and teacher trainers to work together on solutions to these problems.[17]

The success of all such projects as they relate to language arts depends in large measure upon the validity of the assumption that there is information concerning language learning, language in general, social dialects, other cultures, and other languages, which is not currently available to educators, and which if made available to them, would improve the education of children from minority backgrounds. We clearly have not reached the millennium with regard to knowledge in any of these areas, yet it is fair to assume that there is a great deal known of

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17 One successful language arts project supported under this program is the Tri-University Project at the University of Nebraska, directed by Paul Olson.

these topics which has not been given sufficient attention by those running the schools and the teacher preparation institutions.

It would seem that those who work with or train others to work with children whose first dialect or language is other than standard English should have at the minimum:

- information concerning what we know of the nature of language and how it is learned, including an understanding that by the time they enter school, all normal children regardless of cultural backgrounds control the phonology and grammar of at least one language, and if this happens to be a language or dialect other than standard English it is not an indication of some mental of physical aberration on the part of the child.

- an understanding that language variations arise through social and cultural forces, through interactions with people who use these forms and not through "lazy tongues" or "stupidity". It is particularly important that this understanding be communicated to the teachers who themselves have arisen from working- or lower-class backgrounds and who are too often the most rigid and intolerant toward non-standard English, or even toward teaching through a language other than English in bilingual education programs.

- a realization that a first language or dialect

other than standard English interferes seriously with performance in such applications of language skills as reading and writing - and with ultimate performance in subject matter areas.

- an awareness that any new mode of speech should be taught as a supplementary mode rather than as a replacive one. The child is ultimately the one to decide which mode to use on what occasion.

- an understanding that language features which are systematic are to be emphasized in any language arts program rather than those which are incidental items, that attention should be directed to those systematic features of a non-standard dialect that are diagnostic socially, and that each non-English group has, in addition, its own systematic problems.

- an understanding that situational factors strongly influence and may inhibit speech, and that the so-called "non-verbal" child has yet to be discovered, given adequate control for situational variables. An examination of recorded and transcribed conversations of five black children ages 6 to 11 from low-income families in Washington, D. C.[18] for example, should dispel any idea that they suffered from such "non-verbal" afflictions.

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18 Bengt Loman, Conversations in A Negro-American Dialect, (Washington, D. C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1967).

A study of their speech revealed, among other things, that these children:[19]

> - used ten of the fourteen auxiliary verb combinations cited for English,[20] and that those not used were patterns reflecting practical situations which are rather infrequent, e.g., one calling for a form such as <u>had been being eaten</u>.
>
> - used thirteen of the sixteen clause patterns cited for English,[21] and in addition used two copula patterns not used in standard English but used systematically in non-standard Negro English.[22]

- Finally, educators should have an awareness of the resources and studies concerning social dialects, reading, second language teaching and learning, and other aspects of the language arts that are available through such or-

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19 Richard L. Light, "Syntactic Structures in a Corpus of Non-Standard English" (unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Georgetown University, 1969).

20 W. Freeman Twaddell, <u>The English Verb Auxiliaries</u> (Providence: Brown University Press, 1963) p. 3.

21 Henry Gleason Jr., <u>Linguistics and English Grammar</u> (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965) pp. 300-311

22 The pattern with the so-called "invariant be", and one involving absence of copula discussed in Roger Shuy and Ralph Fasold, <u>Current Viewpoints Toward Non-Standard "Be"</u> (Washington, D. C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, forthcoming.

ganizations as NCTE and the Center for Applied Linguistics.

Until educators know about and act upon this kind of information and much more concerning the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of minority group children, it is likely that education for them will continue to be inadequate. Strong leadership at the national level is necessary to insure improvement of educational programs for such children, to guarantee that the millions of dollars continuing to go directly to the schools do not merely support what has proven damaging in the past, and to assure that those running the schools, training the teachers, and teaching in the classrooms have the information necessary to more effectively educate minority group children in all subjects, and particularly in the crucial set of courses known as the language arts.